

## BSFS Poetry Contest 2023 Winners

### Tell the Bees

When we were little  
Gramma Bea would give us  
each our very own wood dipper  
coated with honey from her hives  
as a treat.

To us it was a treat;  
for her, it kept our mouths shut  
while she served her friends  
with gossip and a delicate porcelain tea set  
reserving the cup with the small chip  
in its polished edge for herself.

She taught us that swarms were merely lost souls  
without a compass to guide them  
and that you should only take what you need  
when presented with abundance.

Eventually, she grew ill  
and took to her bed.  
A shadow passed  
in front of the window  
and stayed there.  
The air hummed.

We gathered around her bedside  
and saw her draw her last breath.  
The family left to make arrangements  
but I stayed for a moment more  
and watched her lower lip twitch.

From there, a large bee  
with a swollen abdomen  
extended beyond its wings  
crawled out and  
fanned itself to dry  
from spittle and mucus.

I plucked the bee  
from Gramma Bea's lips  
and carefully cradled it  
until I could get to the door.

Outside, the sky was sunny.  
I walked back to the hives.  
When we got there, the hives were silent  
but a swarm had gathered on the side of the house,  
their buzz a low drone.

I remembered my Gramma's words  
and carefully released the bee near the swarm.  
Immediately, they surrounded her  
but did not harm her.  
Instead they bore their new queen  
off to their new home  
where honey  
and milk would flow.

Ryan E. Holman  
1st Place – © 2023  
Kensington, MD, USA

## BSFS Poetry Contest 2023 Winners

### Call from Alleghania

The ebony night– my chrysalis,  
boundless Fraser fir and red spruce let no light in.  
The mud was soft and oozed around my toes,  
mutual symbiosis,  
until those icy blue eyes met mine in the darkness.

I gasped from slumber– but only a nightmare,  
Dad’s mounted eight point buck stared back.  
Lifeless and beady,  
Just like him ever since Mother never came home.

I come from buckwheat cakes and venison,  
Axes and crackling yules,  
Small town congregations,  
Kneeling on saddle-brown worn pews,  
And whispers of lore– skinwalker territory.

Old Alleghania drew me in,  
Moth to flame,  
Appalachia in all her glory cried at night,  
For me.

I found myself back on the soft mountain floor,  
Canopied and secluded– the cold blue orbs  
emerged again.  
No longer a nightmare,  
Yet a memory deep and repressed.

My mother,  
A bloodcurdling scream,  
Then silence.

It approached me–unwavering gaze of cyan,  
Enveloped me in pelt,  
And crowned me with antlers,  
Welcome back, my child.

Alyssa Granato  
2nd Place – © 2023  
Sicklerville, NJ, USA

### Watching the ISS Pass By

There’s something about it  
that makes me wait,  
like the train I knew  
was on schedule to pass by  
when I was a child.

The landscape of the night  
sky with its stars carries itself  
from one horizon to another  
and I find it amazing  
how little I know about it.

I only recognize the Big Dipper  
and the belt of Orion,  
but from where I stand  
It’s enough to know  
north is beyond the trees.

Everything else spreads  
like a necklace of precious metals  
dangling from the neck  
of a Numidian queen  
from a time no one remembers.

And then it appears,  
on schedule in its path,  
a steady light moving  
in front of all the others,  
affirming my presence,

the fact that I’m here, waiting,  
like the occasional person  
who would notice a boy  
standing alongside  
the tracks and wave back.

Stephen A. Chmelewski  
Honorable Mention – © 2023  
Portugal

## BSFS Poetry Contest 2023 Winners

### The Watchers

And so we sat  
 Stones in the tides of time  
 And watched as worlds began  
 And fell  
 Began  
 And fell

We watched as the first strands of dna  
 Found their way into the center of cells.  
 We watched as they struggled and grew,  
 Found structure and shape.  
 We watched them flit through the water  
 And find myriad ways to live.  
 We watched as the first forests sprouted  
 On blackened volcanic soils  
 And gave new life to the shores.

We are the watchers,  
 The witnesses,  
 The living memory of life.  
 We are the birth,  
 And the death,  
 And the space in-between.  
 We feel each victorious hunt  
 And each failure  
 Each panting escape  
 And each painful end.  
 We are the lovers of life  
 Each birth one of family  
 Each death that of a child  
 To carry with us always

We have watched so many species  
 Call this place their home.  
 We have seen them grow and spread  
 And felt them wither and die.  
 Seen climates cool and warm  
 Asteroids strike and volcanoes blow  
 And now we see a species take death  
 As their calling card  
 And spread like none before.

And in the end  
 we do not change.  
 And we know  
 If we but blink it will be over

And if the dust settles  
 Over the life which once called this place a home  
 It will settle too over us  
 And we will stay the same  
 Watching, Waiting for  
 Dna to find its way into cells  
 And worlds to begin  
 And fall  
 Begin  
 And fall

Søren Evans-Reese  
 Honorable Mention – © 2023  
 Providence, RI, USA

## BSFS Poetry Contest 2023 Winners

### Birds

Before this ashen sky, there were cardinals.  
Suburban forests speckled with red  
blurs. Cardinals are monogamous which means  
they mate for life.

I used to live on a pipestem lined neatly  
with trees. My room was on the front  
side of the house which means  
I had a big watching window. I was something  
of a romantic back then. I imagined  
bird weddings on the front lawn.  
Regal red feather suits and demure,  
brown brides wing to wing. I used to believe  
in love, which means I've always believed in  
remembering.

When she asks me what I miss from Before  
I say the birds but really I mean colors.  
She's from the city which means  
I have to tell her about cardinals. I paint  
pictures with words so that she'll have  
this red memory too.

KG Graham  
3rd Place – © 2023  
Woodbridge, VA, USA

### About the Winning Poets

**Ryan E. Holman** (*First Place*)—Ryan E. Holman has had work appearing in various publications and juried venues over the past two decades, and enjoys writing about mundane and fantastic life through the lens of the elements. She was raised and lives in the mid-Atlantic USA.

**Alyssa Granato** (*Second Place*)—I am a graduate student in Applied Psychology living in the Pine Barrens of Southern New Jersey. I have a fascination with horror and fantasy and love to implement it into my writing. It helps close the gap between what we deem “self” and “other”.

**KG Graham** (*Third Place*)—KG Graham is a poet and educator. Their work has most recently been recognized in the Our Shared Memory Project and in The Poetry Society of Virginia's annual contest. They find joy in hiking, crochet, and teaching high school English.

**Stephen A. Chmielewski** (*Honorable Mention*)—Stephen Chmielewski is a teacher, writer, and traveler who lives in Portugal. He earned his MFA from the University of Arizona.

**Søren Evans-Reese** (*Honorable Mention*)—Søren Evans-Reese is an archaeologist and lover of the outdoors from coast to coast. They aspire to be the third in a line of part-time poets and full-time thinkers.